

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00
SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03
NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 IO-13 ACDA-07
AID-05 TRSE-00 ERDA-05 /079 W
-----130938Z 096120 /11

O R 130842Z MAY 77
FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3879
INFO AMEMBASSY TOKYO
CINCPAC

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: N/A
TAGS: PFOR, MARR, SOPN, KS, US/BROWN-HABIB
SUBJECT: KOREAN PRESS REACTION TO VISIT MAY 24.

SUMMARY: PRESS IS FEATURING AND INEVITABLY SPECULATING ABOUT BROWN-HABIB VISIT, REFLECTING KOREAN ANXIETY OVER WITHDRAWAL TIMING, COMPENSATION, AND OPPORTUNITY FOR ROK TO INFLUENCE ACTUAL DECISIONS. SIMILAR VIEWS REFLECTED IN INFORMAL DISCUSSIONS.

1. ON MAY 12-13, KOREAN PRESS GAVE HEADLINE TREATMENT TO ANNOUNCEMENT OF MAY 24 VISIT BY GENERAL BROWN AND UNDERSECRETARY HABIB AND GENERAL BROWN. HEAVY COVERAGE IN FEATURES, GOSSIP COLUMNS, AND EDITORIALS REFLECTS PRIMARY INTEREST IN SCALE AND TIMING OF WITHDRAWAL, AGAINST BACKGROUND OF CONCERN WHETHER US WILL SIMPLY PRESENT ITS DECISION OR IF ROK WILL HAVE SOME ROLE IN DETERMINING OUTCOME.

2. AS IS INEVITABLE, MAJOR FOCUS OF NEWS STORIES IS
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SPECULATION ABOUT VISIT. FRONT PAGE FEATURE BY HAN'SGUK ILBO'S CHO SUN-HWAN WRITING FROM WASHINGTON QUOTES DOD OFFICIAL AS SAYING 7,500 SUPPLY TROOPS WILL REMAIN, EVEN AFTER WITHDRAWAL, AND TWO MONTHS' SUPPLY OF AMMUNITION AND EQUIPMENT SHOULD BE PROVIDED. NOTING A RECENT PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY HAD FOUND PRESIDENT CARTER UNEXPECTEDLY CONSERVATIVE, ARTICLE CONCLUDES WITH HOPEFUL OBSERVATION

THAT THOSE WHO EMPHASIZE THIS PRUDENCE OF CARTER ARE PREDICTING A "SYMBOLIC AND CAUTIOUS" WITHDRAWAL OF 4 - 5,000 TROOPS, BEGINNING NEXT YEAR. OFFICIAL ENGLISH-LANGUAGE KOREA HERALD RAN HAPTONG ITEM FROM WASHINGTON AS TOP STORY, QUOTING ROK EMBASSY OFFICIALS IN WASHINGTON AS INDICATING US PROPOSAL, BESIDES WITHDRAWAL, WILL COVER STRENGTHENING OF ROK MILITARY, PARTICULARLY IN "AIR POWER AND ANTI-TANK CAPABILITIES."

3. HAN'GUK ILBO TOP STORY MAY 13 QUOTES "HIGH ROK GOVERNMENT SOURCE" THAT BROWN-HABIB VISIT IS JUST START OF A LONG PROCESS, WITH FOCUS TO BE ON AGREEING ON PRINCIPLES, RATHER THAN DETAILS. PAPER QUOTES "A DIPLOMATIC SOURCE" AS SAYING THAT PROSPECTS ARE "ALMOST CERTAIN FOR FORMATION OF A WORKING-LEVEL CONSULTATIVE BODY COMPOSED OF FONMIN PAK ONG-JIN AND AMBASSADOR SNEIDER FOR DIPLOMATIC ASPECTS AND DEFMIN SO CHONG-CH'OL AND GENERAL VESSEY FOR MILITARY ONES. KOREA-US SECURITY CONSULTATIVE MEETING AT END OF JULY WOULD THEN MAKE FINAL DECISIONS ON "SCALE AND PARTICULARS" OF WITHDRAWAL. (STORY CARRIED BY HAPTONG MAY 12 ATTRIBUTES COMMENTS SIMILAR TO THESE TO FOREIGN MINISTER PARK TONG-JINML

4. ON MAY 13, TONGA ILBO LEAD STORY QUOTED A GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL AS SAYING ROKG'S BASIC FOCUS IN TALKS WILL BE ON OBTAINING A "MEMORANDUM OR OTHER DOCUMENT" REFLECTING POINTS OF AGREEMENT IN ORDER TO GUARANTEE US SUPPORT FOR STRENGTHENING OF ROK DEFENSES AND PROBLEM OF SECURITY ON KOREAN PENINSULA. SOURCES SAID THERE "WILL BE FLEXIBILITY IN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DATES FOR BEGINNING AND COMPLETING THE WITHDRAWAL." START OF WITHDRAWAL MUST BE DELAYED AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE, AND CARRIED OUT IN STEP WITH IMPROVEMENT IN KOREAN MILITARY FORCES. FIRST STAGE OF WITHDRAWAL WILL OCCUR NEXT YEAR OR LATER."

5. COMMENTARIES AND EDITORIALS MENTION MOST OFTEN NECESSITY FOR "SUFFICIENT" STRENGTHENING OF ROK MILITARY BEFORE WITHDRAWAL MAY BE COMPLETED. OTHER ISSUES RAISED INCLUDE NECESSITY TO AVOID CAUSING A -VACUUM OF POWER," SOUTH-NORTH NON-AGGRESSION PACT, FOUR-POWER MEETING TO GUARANTEE PEACE ON KOREAN PENINSULA, RETURN OF OPERATIONAL COMMAND TO KOREA, CONTINUED PRESENCE OF U.S. NUCLEAR WEAPONS, PROBLEMS OF UN COMMAND AND ARMISTICE SYSTEM, AND EVEN POLICIES TO IMPROVE ROK-US RELATIONS. HANGUK ILBO CONCLUDES ITS EDITORIAL MAY 13 WITH CALL FOR PRUDENCE IN PREPARING FOR TALKS AND FOR LISTENING CAREFULLY TO OTHER SIDE. CONCERN EXTENDS EVEN TO US NEGOTIATORS: ONE FEATURE ARTICLE SAYS BROWN-HABIB TEAM IS "SYMBOLIC (OF IMPORTANCE OF TALKS) AND

PRACTICAL," BUT THEN GOES ON TO QUOTE ANOTHER SOURCE TO EFFECT THAT HABIB IS "FORCEFUL AND PERSISTENT NEGOTIATOR" AND WILL BE DIFFICULT TO MANAGE" BECAUSE HE KNOWS KOREA WELL AND CAN "USE SITUATION TO HIS ADVANTAGE."

6. PRESS COMMENTS REFLECT INTENSE INTEREST ALL KOREANS HAVE IN THIS VISIT AND THEIR WIDELY SHARED CONCERNS AND HOPES. FOR EXAMPLE, ONE KOREAN GENERAL NOT DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN PREPARATION ASKED EMBASSY MAY 12 IF CONSULATIONS WOULD REALLY PERMIT GIVE AND TAKE, OR SIMPLY CONSTITUTE UNILATERAL PRESENTATION. SAME OFFICER ALSO REFLECTED A WIDESPREAD HOPE IN ASKING IF THERE WERE STILL POSSIBILITY OF CANCELLING WITHDRAWAL PLAN.

7. WE TOOK OCCASION OF DELIVERING TEXT OF DEPARTMENT MAY 11 PRESS BRIEFING ON VISIT TO CHIEF AMERICAN BUREAU DIRECTOR PARK SANG-YONG ABOUT PRESS SPECULATION LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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POINTING OUT IMPORTANCE OF KEEPING KOREAN FEET ON THE GROUND. LOOKING PAINED, PARK SAID STORIES WERE PURELY JOURNALIST'S FABRICATION AND DID NOT REPRESENT OFFICIAL VIEWS ON BRIEFINGS. HE ALSO SAID THAT FORNMIN PARK HAD CALLED IN PRESS CORPS MAY 13 "TO CHEW THEM OUT" FOR EXCESSIVE SPECULATION AND ADDED THAT HE HIMSELF WOULD BE WORKING HARD TO CONSTRAIN PRESS. WE UNDERSTAND FROM PRESS SOURCES, HOWEVER, THAT FORNMIN PAK DID MEET REPORTERS MAY 12 INFORMALLY, SO WE ASSUME PRESS SPECULATION, DESPITE DENIAL, PROBABLY NOT FAR FROM FORNMIN'S THINKING.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRESS COMMENTS, VISITS, TROOP REDUCTIONS
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Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977SEOUL04000
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770169-0007
Format: TEL
From: SEOUL
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
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Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770561/aaaacagw.tel
Line Count: 150
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Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: c1baa494-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
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Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2534690
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: KOREAN PRESS REACTION TO VISIT MAY 24. SUMMARY: PRESS IS FEATURING AND INEVITABLY SPECULATING ABOUT BROWN-HABIB VISIT, REFLECTING KOREAN ANXIETY
TAGS: PFOR, MARR, SOPN, KS, US, (HABIB, PHILIP C), (BROWN, GEORGE)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/c1baa494-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009